

10 KEY MESSAGES ABOUT BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

The ten key messages for Government (and the wider public sector) that emerged from the “What Works in Behaviour Change?” conference are summarised below:

Government leadership

1. **The public expects Government (and its wider partners) to act.** There is also an appetite for Government to lead. A UK survey¹ suggested that most people think government should take the lead in combating climate change, even if it means using the law to change people’s behaviour. Research² also suggests that people believe Government has already choice-edited damaging environmental products from our shelves and that, if the problem were genuinely serious, regulatory action would be taken.
2. **Government (and its wider partners) has to be seen to be consistently low-carbon** in its approach to all elements of its portfolio. Research³ suggests that Government (including individual Ministers) needs to act in a manner consistent with its low carbon aspirations if people are to take action themselves. Policies (e.g. support for air travel) that contradict key messages (e.g. use of public transport) undermine public belief in the seriousness of the Government’s resolve and the fairness of the measures introduced.

Understanding what drives change

3. **Government policy-making needs to do more to embrace the complexity of what drives action and inaction.** Evidence⁴ is clear that facilitating conditions (e.g. structures, the organisation of the built environment, and local services) have far greater influence on many behaviours than values and attitudes. Yet changing values and attitudes are often the focus of government work.
4. **Social norms are key.** Seeing other people – neighbours, friends, leaders, colleagues - behaving pro-environmentally can have a profound effect on behaviours across society. The Government and its partners need to be able to influence social norms more effectively. Providing infrastructure is a visible way to success in this sense (e.g. walking and cycle routes, recycling street and house facilities). Regulation is also a key route to changing social norms.
5. **Change happens locally and in groups.** Behavioural initiatives and campaigns tailored to local contexts and local or group (e.g. age, profession, workplace) identity are more likely to be effective than national ones because they speak to ‘us’ and our identity more directly. Focussing on local contexts, identities and change may cost more than a national campaign, but evidence⁵ suggests that effort focused here may

¹ Ipsos Mori (2007) Tipping Point or Turning Point? Social Marketing & Climate Change

² Defra (2007) A Synthesis Review of the Public Understanding Research Projects

³ Department for Transport (2009) Nine Big Questions about Behaviour Change

⁴ Jackson, T (2005) Motivating Sustainable Consumption: A Review of Evidence on Consumer Behaviour and Behavioural Change

⁵ Reicher, S et al (2010) The New Psychology of Leadership: identity, influence and power

be more effective in the long run. The Climate Challenge Fund is one obvious example where local solutions are being prioritised.

6. **Transparency and simplicity** are required in policies intended to change behaviours, e.g. road pricing, home energy tariffs. If it's complicated, people stick with the status quo as this is the easier option.

Government engagement and communications

7. **Any engagement work must approach behavioural change as a genuinely joint endeavour.** If people are to be empowered to act, engagement work needs to avoid telling people what *they* should do. The focus needs to be on 'we' – acting together, moving towards the same goal. People are sensitive to and less likely to respond where there is perceived unfairness and inconsistency so ensuring everyone feels they are bearing the same burden is key.
8. **The Government needs to focus on key behavioural areas** where a) tackling carbon emissions will genuinely make a difference to meeting our targets and b) we can actually enable or encourage people to change. This clarifies what we (as a nation) want to achieve and avoids people thinking they are doing their bit for climate change by taking on simpler green actions like recycling.

Integration of policies

9. **Behaviour change is most effective when a number of levers (e.g. price, regulation, enabling measures and public benefits) are pulled in a coherent, co-ordinated and systematic way.** This increases the likelihood of success – evidence⁶ suggests that engagement is rarely effective alone and that structural changes (including provision of infrastructure, influencing price and regulation) are more likely to have an impact. This joint approach reduces the risk of mixed messages and inconsistency, and provides opportunities to ensure fairness by enabling change at the same time as regulating for it. If policies are ultimately successful, initially hostile attitudes can change dramatically (e.g. London congestion charge).
10. **Behaviour change and technology need to be addressed together, as two sides of one coin.** Too often they are polarised, but developing technologies that encourage behaviour change, and behaviour change initiatives that foster new technologies, would be a positive step.

⁶ Living With Environmental Change (LWEC) (2009) Public Attitudes to Environmental Change